

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Tawassul, Istighātha, Shirk and Causality

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If they [the Salafis] prohibit seeking the favor of Allah by mentioning the things He loves [*al-tawassul*] and seeking the help [*al-istighātha*] [of His creatures] and hold it to be *shirk* simply because it is *tawassul* and *istighātha*, then the complaint of one who has been wronged that he addresses to one who might grant him justice will be *shirk*, and a person’s seeking the help of someone else in the fulfillment of his personal affairs will be *shirk*, and a king’s seeking the help of his army in wars will be *shirk*, and the army’s seeking help from the king to obtain what it requires; in fact we can say that according to their supposition [that seeking the help of creatures is *shirk*] that a students seeking the help of tradesmen and artisans which people cannot do without, and even a patient’s seeking the help of a doctor is *shirk*. In fact, according to their principle the Israelite who sought the help of Musa عليه السلام as Allah—exalted is He—recounts [in the Qur’an]: “Then the one who was of his side sought his help against the one who was his enemy and Musa عليه السلام struck him and killed him, (28:15)” committed *shirk*. So many other absurdities follow from this principle that no reasonable person maintains it let alone a distinguished man of learning.

This is all true if they insist that seeking help from others than Allah is prohibited merely because it is help as we supposed above. However, if they hold that *tawassul* and *istighātha* is *shirk* with respect to the dead but not to the living then we will reply that there is no basis for this position once you have conceded that seeking the help of others apart from Allah when they are alive is not *shirk* given what is mentioned in the Qur’an and given the agreement of all people in all places and times. Furthermore, there is no basis for the position that seeking an effect from other than Allah is sometimes *shirk* while at other times it is not because in any case there is the attribution of the effect to other than Allah [which outwardly speaking at least is the essence of *shirk*].

However, if they say that we do not believe that the efficient cause [what acts directly to produce an effect] actually exists independently in the living creatures whose help we seek, we will reply to them that in that case you are bound to associate the prohibition with the belief that the living creatures are the efficient cause independent of Allah - there being no difference between the case of the living and the dead. So in the case where such a belief does exist there will be *shirk*, otherwise not, regardless of whether one seeks from the living or the dead. On the other hand if the sufficient reason for the prohibition is the apparent

¹ d. 1365 / 1946; Egypt, a teacher at al-Azhar University, a Maliki faqīh, and a renown *muḥaddith*. This translation by Maulvi Muhammad Yusaf al-Kanadi presented with minor modification is an excerpt of an article written by ‘Allāmah Dijwī - may Allah have mercy upon his soul - contributed to al-Azhar’s monthly magazine, *Majallah al-Azhar* :

التوسل والاستغاثة للدجوي ، مجلة الأزهر ، العدد الثالث ، المجلد الثاني ، ربيع الأول سنة 1350 .

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attribution of efficient cause [to others apart from Allah] that is understood from the outward expression then all of that must be *shirk* [that is, seeking the help of the living as well as the dead] so that even a person's asking his brother to help him pack his horse or to build his house or to dig a ditch and so on as we explained in the first supposition [in the first paragraph of this citation].

However, if they say that we attribute those acts and causes to other than Allah—exalted is He—in the case of living creatures believing that the creation [of the acts] and the origination [of them] is only due to Allah—exalted is He—and that the living only acquire the deed [which is the Asharite doctrine of *kasb*] nothing more, then we will reply that likewise that is the case when one seeks the help of the dead or seeks the favor of Allah by mentioning them [*tawassul*] and the indication that this is so is the same in both cases, namely the belief [of the speaker] that Allah alone has power in the heavens and the earth and that all things devolve on Him entirely and that what He willed becomes and what He did not never will be and that He alone is the creator and that there is no originator but He.

On the other hand, if according to them the secret of the prohibition is that the dead cannot do what he is asked to do [namely, to pray to Allah for them] then we will say to them that in the first place that does not mean that to ask them to do that will be *shirk* rather only absurdity. In fact seeking the help of the living is closer to *shirk* than seeking the help of the dead because in the case of the living it is more likely that one might actually believe that they have direct power to give and to restrain as it appears to the senses and experience were it not for the light of belief and clear rational evidence.

Then in the second place we will say to them what is the meaning of your statement that the dead cannot do anything? According to you, what is its inward meaning and its secret? If it is because you believe that the dead have become dust, then how astray you are in your religion and how ignorant you are of what has been transmitted to you from your Prophet ﷺ, indeed from your Lord, regarding the affirmation of the life of the souls and their continuance after they leave the bodies. [Among what has been transmitted that you have ignored is] the Prophet's speaking to the souls of the dead on the day of [the Battle] of Badr when he said,

O so and so son of so and so, are you pleased that you obeyed Allah and His messenger? For we have found what our Lord promised [that is victory over the unbelievers] to be true? Have you too found what your Lord promised to be true? 'Umar said to him, "O Messenger of Allah, you are addressing bodies that have no souls!" The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, "By Him in whose keeping is the soul of Muhammad, you cannot hear what I say better than them."²

² 'Allāmah al-Dijwī quoted the ḥadīth in paraphrase, so I have quoted verbatim from the report given by al-Bukhārī in his *Ṣaḥīḥ* from Abi Talḥa in *Kitāb al-Maghāzī, Bāb 5*, ḥadīth no. 3976 (Riyadh: Dar al-Salām, 1419/1999). Al-Bukhārī reported the ḥadīth in several places in his *Ṣaḥīḥ* and so did Muslim. Here follows one of the versions reported by Muslim from Anas:

The Messenger of Allah left Badr for three days then he returned to them [the slain of Quraish] and standing over them he called out to them saying, "O Abu Jahl ibn Hishām, O Umayyah ibn Khalf, O 'Utbah ibn Rabī 'ah, have you not found what your Lord promised you [terrible punishment] to be true, for I have found what my Lord promised to be true." Umar heard the statement of the Prophet so he said to him, "How can they hear and how will they ever reply seeing that they have become rotting cadavers?" He replied, "By Him in whose keeping is my soul, you are not better able to hear what I say to them although they cannot reply." Then he gave orders and they were dragged and thrown into a pit at Badr.

Among what [has been transmitted that you have ignored] is his greeting with *salām* the dead in the graveyard and his saying to them “Peace be upon you O people of the dwellings of the grave.”³ Among that also are the ḥadīth that deal with the punishment of the grave and its bliss⁴ and which affirm the soul’s coming and going and so on among the many proofs that Islam has come with and which the philosophers of old and anew have also affirmed. Here we will content ourselves with asking one question: Do they [the Salafis] believe that the martyrs are alive in the keeping of their Lord as the Qur’an has declared or not? If they don’t believe that there is no need to carry on any discussion with them since they have denied the Qur’an which declares: “Do not say about those who have been slain in jihad for Allah to be dead; nay they are alive although you do not perceive that, (2:154)” and also “Do not consider those who have been slain in jihad for Allah to be dead; rather they are alive in the keeping of their Lord receiving their provision. (3:169)” However, if they believe that then we will say to them: Many of the prophets and many of the Companions are better than the martyrs without any doubt so if it is established that the martyrs are alive then for all the more reason it will be established that those who are better than them are also alive.

In fact the fact that the prophets are alive in their graves is stated expressly in some ḥadīth [and I will mention some of them next] and indeed the Prophet ﷺ saw Musa ʿalayh al-salām praying on the Red Sandhill and he advised him many times when fifty daily prayers were being instituted for every day and night until the prayers were reduced to five.⁵ Likewise he met Adam and Ibrāhīm and other prophets ʿalayh al-salām all of which shows that the souls of the prophets are alive no doubt about it.



³ The wording exactly as ‘Allāmah al-Dijwī has it is not reported from the Prophet ﷺ as far as I can ascertain; however that wording is reported from Ali by al-Ṭabarānī in his *Muʿjam al-Kabīr* and from Salmān by Ibn Abi Shaibah in his *al-Muṣannaf*. However, Muslim reported something similar in his *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *Kitāb al-Ṭahārah*, ḥadīth 584 (Riyadh: Dar al-Salām, 1419/1998) that Abu Hurairah said:

The Messenger of Allah ﷺ came to the graveyard and said: “Peace be upon you O abode of the believers. If Allah wills we will be joining you.”

⁴ There are numerous ḥadīth that show this, and whole books have been written mentioning such ḥadīth, for example Ibn al-Qayyim’s *Kitāb al-Rūḥ* and Ibn al-Rajab’s *Aḥwāl al-Qubūr* and al-Suyūṭī’s *Sharḥ al-Suḍūr* and al-Qurtubī’s *al-Tadhkirah* and Ibn Abi al-Dunya’s *Kitāb al-Qubūr*. I will mention here by way of example a ḥadīth that al-Tirmidhī reported in his *Sunan* in *Kitāb al-Zuhd*, ḥadīth no. 2460 (Riyadh: Dar al-Salām, 1420/1999) from Abu Saʿīd:

The Messenger of Allah ﷺ came out to his place of prayer and saw some people who seemed to be grinning. He said to them: “Look, if you remembered the destroyer of pleasures it would distract you from what I see [you doing]. Death [is the destroyer of pleasures]! Remember much the destroyer of pleasures for not a day comes to the grave but that it speaks and says, ‘I am the house of banishment! I am the house of loneliness! I am the house of worms!’ When the believing slave is buried the grave says to him, ‘Welcome! Make yourself at home! Listen, you were the dearest person that walked upon my back. Today I have been put in charge of you and you have come to me, so you will see what I will do with you,’ and it spreads out for him as far as he can see and it opens for him a window to Paradise. However, when a wicked slave or an unbeliever is buried the grave says to him, ‘No welcome to you and no comfort for you! You were the most hateful to me of those who used to walk on my back so since I have been put in charge of you today and since you have come to me you will see what I will do with you,’ and it will compact about him until it crushes him causing his ribs to cross over one another.” Then the Messenger of Allah made a motion with his fingers putting them inside one another, then he said, “Allah will put over him seventy huge serpents. Were one of them to breathe on earth nothing would grow as long as the world endured. Then they bite him and scratch him continuing to do so until the Day of Judgment. The grave is either one of the gardens of Paradise or one of the pits of Hell.

⁵ Al-Bukhārī reported it in his *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *Kitāb Manāqib al-Anṣār*, *Bāb al-Miʿrāj*, ḥadīth no. 3887 (Riyadh: Dar al-Salām, 1419/1999).